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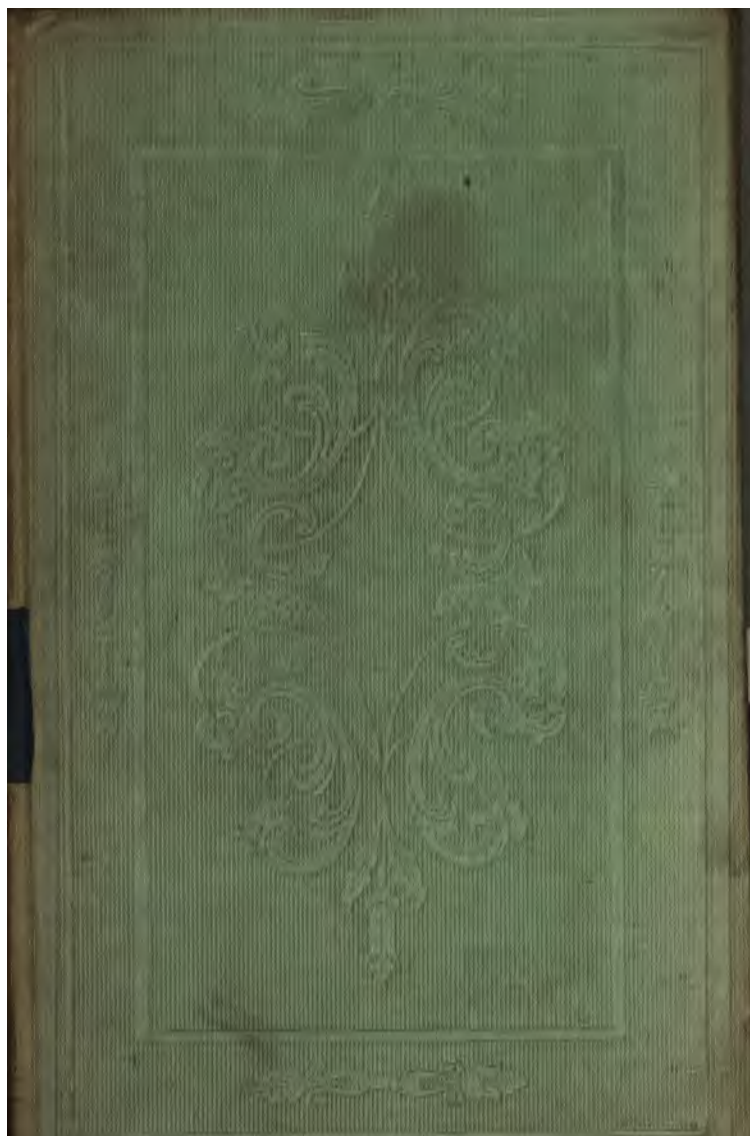
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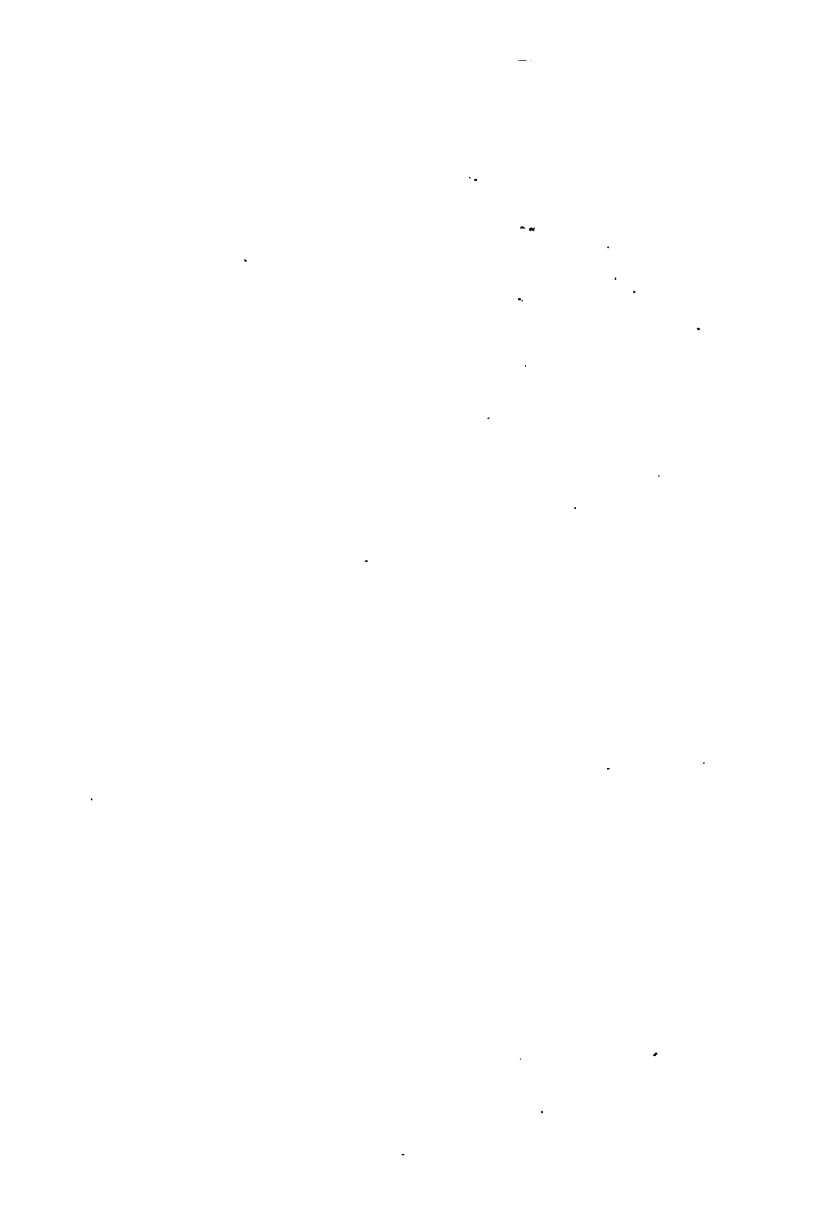
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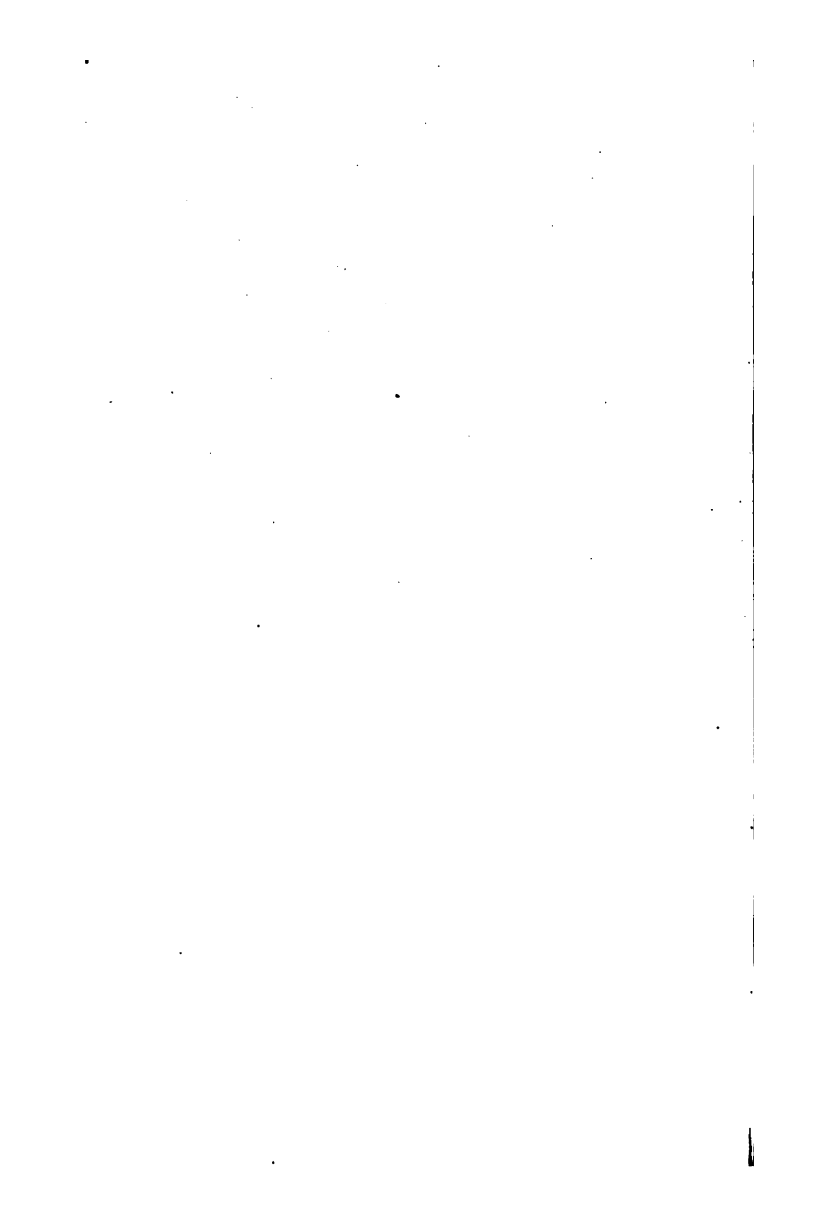
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RUTH THE MOABITESS.

BY

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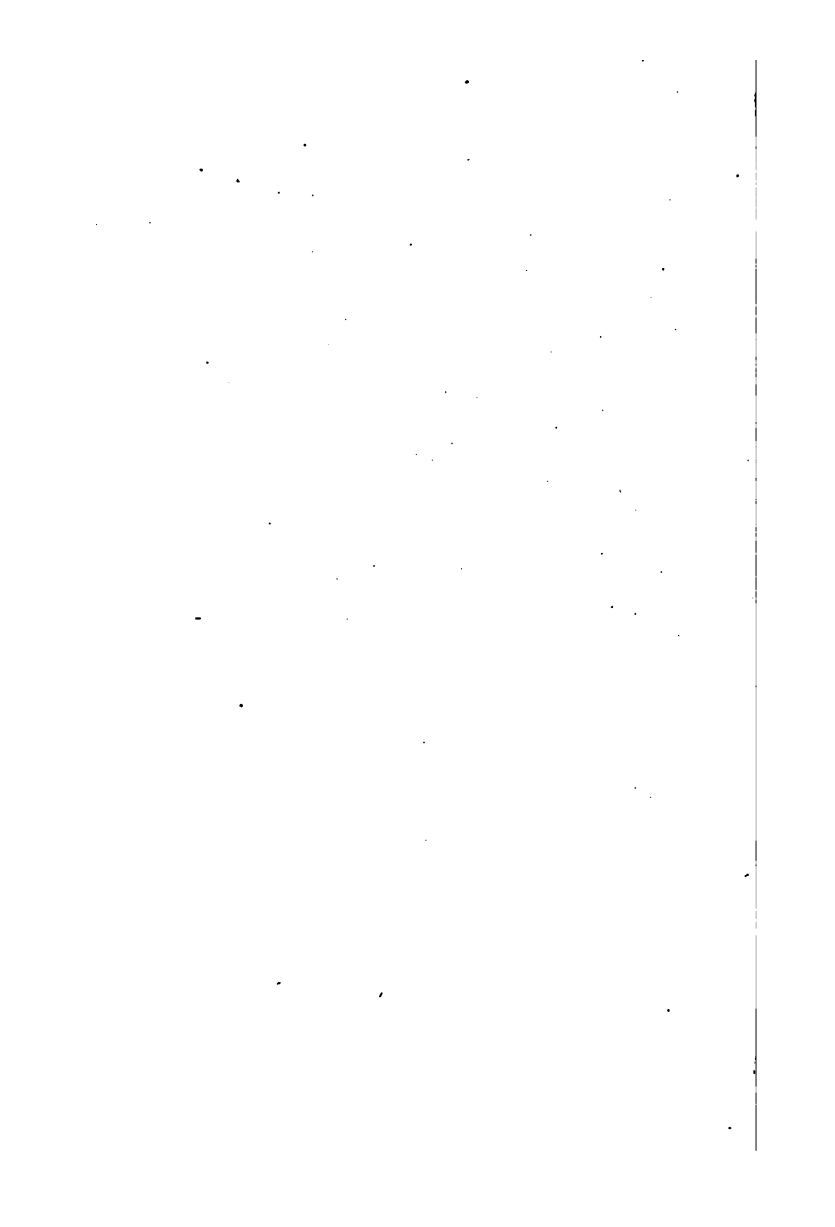
PREFACE.

THE following little work was delivered in the form of Lectures to the writer's Congregation during the "weeks of harvest;" and, having been favourably received in that narrow circle, it is now, at the request of a few friends who were interested in its delivery, published, in the hope that in a wider sphere it may excite the same interest in this Daughter of Moab, and by the Divine blessing, induce some to seek her grace, and obtain with her "a full reward of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings she came to trust."

MARYPORT.

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INTRODUCTION.

THE Books of the Law were anciently divided into as many *Parashim* or sections as there were Sabbaths in the Jewish year ; while the Prophets, including some of the Historical Books, were divided into the same number of *Haphtoroth* or chapters. One of each of these was read in the synagogues every Sabbath, so that the whole of them were read through once a year. A degree of wisdom was exercised in the arrangement of these, to adapt the subject of the lessons to the solemn feasts of the Mo-

saic ritual, or to the season of the year. With great propriety the Book of Ruth was appointed to be read during harvest, containing, as it does, a beautiful and affecting picture of Jewish life during that pleasant and stirring season. It was rightly judged, that the lesson designed to be taught by the story would come home to the feelings more powerfully, while scenes similar to those amidst which the story lies, were passing around. No harvest worth naming is now reaped in Judea. The fields around Bethlehem, Jerusalem, and Samaria, are now scantily sown and sparingly reaped. The valleys of Rephaim and Elah, once "covered over with corn," are now bare as the mountains of Gilboa ; for the spoiler is there, and the land enjoys her Sabbaths, and lies desolate for the iniquity of the

people who call it their own. The instruction once imparted to them, now falls upon other ears ; and those who hear and own the Voice which speaks in these ancient narratives, must learn what the Jew refused to know, or, like him, lose the privileges they now enjoy. While the harvest treasures are waving around us, or falling before the reaper bands, or the shouts of "harvest home" are heard, let us send our thoughts back to the story of this Moabite gleaner in the fields of Boaz. There we shall find much to admire, in the way by which the Lord brings good out of evil ; and, while he punishes his people for their transgressions, never suffers his faithfulness or mercy toward them to fail.

There is a charm in this touching story

which never allows it to grow old or stale. This is to be attributed partly to the *truth to nature* in the narrative, and partly to the *truth to grace* in the sentiments expressed. Manners and customs vary in different ages and nations, and nowhere does the peculiarity of some usages of the Jews in olden time more appear than in this short book ; but still the heart of man, both in its good and ill, is the same in every age and clime. “ As face answereth to face in a glass,” so will the heart of Naomi and Ruth and Boaz answer to some in all times ; and where that heart is truthfully laid open, as here, it will be found that, peculiar as some of their circumstances were, their sins and frailties, their frames and feelings, are faithfully reflected by the lives of many a believer still. The grace of

God, too, changes not ; its features rise above, or shine through the peculiarity of customs and manners, which it sanctifies where harmless, refines where rude, and modifies where prejudicial to piety. None but the ignorant or narrow-minded will take offence at these usages so different from ours, while the truly intelligent, even though destitute of piety, will admire a narrative so true to nature, and so satisfactory in its result, to human feeling. It is said that the celebrated Benjamin Franklin, being in a company which was admiring some of the legends of ancient Greece, told them that he had once read an eastern tale still more tender and interesting. At the request of the company he told it. It was the story of Ruth, with the names of persons and places changed.

Not recognising it, all were loud in its praise, and begged to know where he had met with it. He told them ; and, sceptic as he himself was, he administered a severe rebuke on the interest shewn in fictitious and heathen narratives, while the greater beauties of the sacred Scriptures were neglected or despised.

I.

THE REMOVAL.

No king as yet had reigned in Israel when the events of this narrative took place. Jehovah was Israel's King. While they served Him, under his mild and invisible monarchy they felt no need of a supreme ruler. The elders of each city were competent to settle every difference, and to put forth all the authority needed to secure peace and safety. But when they fell into idolatry, then, "scourged by the rod of men," oppressed by the surrounding nations, they cried in their distress to God. He, mindful of his covenant, raised up temporary rulers in the person of the Judges, by whom he saved them from their oppressors ; but who

were ready to lay down the partial authority they assumed, as soon as the occasion which called it forth had ceased. Such were Othniel, Barak, Jephtha, Gideon, and Samuel.

The land by this time had been subdued and divided, and the Mosaic Law of inheritance was in full force and operation. Each family was enjoying its own portion of land, or paternal inheritance. All were in the situation most favourable to the cultivation of piety—a state of competence—the result of industry.

But no state exempts from temptation, sin, and consequent punishment. There was a famine in the land, severe and protracted. Under the immediate government of God, this was always corrective for sin ; the threatened consequence of departing from God. “ If thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God.....thy heaven that is over thy head shall be brass, and the earth that is under thee shall be iron.

The Lord shall make the rain of thy land powder and dust. Thou shalt carry much seed into thy field, and shalt gather little in.....Because thou servedst not the Lord thy God with joyfulness and with gladness of heart for the abundance of all things," (Deut. xxviii. 15, 23, 38, 47.) The famine seems to have been universal in the Holy Land, though not extending beyond its borders,—a still surer mark of its judicial nature.

At this time, in the rich and fertile district of Ephratah, the chief town of which was Bethlehem, there was one Elimelech, who, like others, possessed his portion of land ; and belonging, as he did, to the very first family in the tribe of Judah, which was most extensively endowed, that portion could not have been small. But land in the time of famine is of little value, and Elimelech seems to have sold his ; that is, alienated it from his family till the year of release, or the jubilee—when, according to

the Mosaic institution, it would return to it, should any of its members survive till that festival. Then, gathering up all his property of a moveable kind, he left his country, and emigrated with all his family, consisting of his wife Naomi, and two sons, • Mahlon and Chilion, to the land of Moab; which lay to the east of Judah.

The history simply narrates the fact of Elimelech's emigration, leaving us to infer the sin of this, both from the injunctions given to Israel in the Law, and from the consequences of the step. There was distrust of God in it. He had given that land to his people for a perpetual possession ; and, by the nature of His laws and institutions, he meant that it should not be alienated for ever. Besides, the very purpose for which He had called them as a people, and given them that land, would be frustrated by their removal from it. They were there to maintain the peculiar ordinances of His appointment, and be separate from

all other nations. Temporary inflictions of famine, pestilence, or reverse in war were not intended to drive them from the land, but to try their fidelity. In this duty Elimelech failed. He saw distress coming ; he saw famine impending ; the ills of penury he could not bear ; the promise of God he could not trust ; he therefore left the promised land, the society of the people of God, the ordinances of divine worship, the tabernacle, the altar, the sacrifices, the solemn assemblies, the sacred feasts, and the days of humiliation and fasting, now more especially called for. To forego all these weighed less with Elimelech than the ills of poverty, the privations and humiliations of reduced circumstances. So he left the land. But whither will he go ? There is no country where God is known, or Jehovah worshipped, save that one which he is leaving. Perhaps the motive which induced him to abandon one country guided him in his choice of another. The land of Moab lay

near, and there was plenty there ; for “Moab hath been at ease from his youth, and hath settled on his lees.” There he would see nothing, hear nothing, but idol-gods, cruel deeds, lascivious rites, under a semblance of worship,—nothing but sights and sounds that pollute the imagination, deprave the heart, and are fatal to piety. Yet he went forth to go into the land of Moab, and into the land of Moab he came.

Elimelech was not the last of the professed worshippers of God who have yielded to the dictates of policy rather than of piety. How many, visited by Divine Providence with the loss of property, instead of bowing beneath the stroke, and reducing their expenditure to their diminished income, have removed to a distance where the stroke would be less felt, and the humiliating reverse be less known. True, they leave not a “*holy land*,” nor, perhaps, go into “a land of idols,” but they do leave many of the spiritual advantages they possessed, and com-

munion they professed to enjoy, the loss of which weighs less with them than the self-denial and submission to which they were called in the path of duty.

And did Elimelech prolong his days in the land of his choice? No. "Naomi's husband died; and she was left and her two sons." The evil he sought to shun met him in his retreat, and the survivors were taught that "life is more than meat, and the body than raiment;" that "life consisteth not in abundance of possessions." Thus the stay of the family and the guide of its youth was withdrawn.

Did they learn wisdom from this stroke, and immediately return? No. They still remain; and, as if to bind them to their adopted country, the young men allow their affections to go out toward the daughters of that land, all idolaters though they were. "They took them wives of the women of Moab, the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth." Thus they

broke the command of God, so expressly and repeatedly enjoined, with respect to their intercourse with idolaters. "Thou shalt not make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son," Deut. vii. 3. They forgot how much alliance of this kind with Moab had cost their fathers, and the natural tendency of such a union to efface the salutary impressions of their earlier youth. Perhaps they wished it, and thought that in domestic bliss they should forget their country and all its religious associations.

That bliss was short! "Mahlon and Chilion died also, both of them, and the woman was left of her two sons and her husband." Thus, before they had any children to inherit their property in the land of Israel, they died. Their family was now extinct. Their widowed mother, now in years, was left alone in a land of strangers, where the Jewish name was hated and

scorned. In the language of another widow, her "coal was quenched in Israel." How manifest "the hand of the Lord" in all this, as she herself afterwards acknowledged ! Men may flee from His face,—they may leave His worship and service,—they may forsake His people, and try to forget His word, but "God is not mocked"—cannot be deceived. He can and will follow them by messengers of judgment, whose message shall be understood. He will shew that he is everywhere to correct and punish, and if men will not learn his will from his written word, they shall be taught it from his afflictive providence.

II.

THE DECISION.

“NAOMI had heard in the country of Moab, how that the Lord had visited his people in giving them bread.” It was one of the terms of the Lord’s covenant with Israel, that if they forsook him, he would prove his authority, and correct their wanderings by temporal afflictions. Long and severe was the famine by which Israel was now taught the judgments of the Lord. But “He will not always chide, neither will he keep his anger for ever.” “He remembered their affliction, and heard their cry.” He “*visited* his people,” as if he had long been absent, and, returning, had brought a blessing with him,—“giving them bread.”

Tidings of returning plenty were soon conveyed to the land of Moab, and fell on the ears of a desolate exile there. They reminded her that as famine had been the plea for leaving the inheritance of the Lord, that plea was now withdrawn, and there was nothing now to stay her return. Little there was, indeed, to induce her to return now, at least of the same kind that had drawn her forth. Poorer than ever, and with no hope of bettering her condition,—no means of redeeming the family property, and, being a widow without posterity, having no claim to it at the year of release. In leaving Moab, she left behind all that was dear to her. The bones of her husband and children lay *there*; and *there* were her two daughters-in-law, who really loved her, and might be a comfort in her declining years. Yet “she arose that she might return from the land of Moab.” And the land of Judah was the promised land. Naomi still worshipped the Lord; and though in

the days of her prosperity she had slighted the means of grace, and preferred competence in a land of idols, to penury in the Lord's inheritance, yet now she remembered in adversity that "a Father to the fatherless, and a Judge to the widow, was God *in his holy habitation*;" that *there* He promised to "set the solitary in families." She sets out in return to the land in whose tabernacles "God is known for a refuge."

And to accompany her a little on her way, came forth the two widows of her departed sons. She loved them, and they loved her, and there seems to have been good cause for this mutual affection. They reach the border of the land, and now must part. Here another struggle arose in Naomi's mind. How will she break the last link that bound her to those now sleeping in death in the field of Moab? Many instances of female heroism stand on record, but few can shew so perfect an example as Naomi affords of the union of the

tender and the true, with the calm fortitude of disinterested love and deep feeling. She first breaks silence, "Go, return each to her mother's house; the Lord deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me: The Lord grant you that ye may find rest, each of you, in the house of her husband. Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voice and wept." There is no foolish sentimentalism here. It is simply her dismissal of her daughters-in-law to their first home, to be as they had been before she knew them. To have a correct idea of their mutual position, the unchangeable custom of the East should be understood. The mother was ever mistress of her son's household, even after his death. Their wives were her daughters as much as her own, and remained such, even when they became widows, and were not allowed to marry out of the family without her consent. They were wholly at her disposal. According to custom, ever stronger in the

East than law, Naomi might still claim Ruth and Orpah as her household, and they must follow. But now leaving Moab, she kindly releases them from this obligation ; she will not bind them to share her sufferings and privations longer. "Return, each to her mother's house." In the East, the female apartments, called "the house of the women," stood apart from the men's ; and with the mother resided the daughters till married. Better they should find a refuge there than wander with her. More likely would they be to meet with husbands in their own land, than where the stranger was shunned and deemed an outcast.

How beautiful the parting blessing! "The Lord deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me." How delicately she acknowledges their dutiful conduct to *the dead*, their husbands,—*to her*, their mother! She cannot name them, but well is the term understood. There is nothing selfish or inconsiderate in Naomi's

sorrow. Though she, a widow, advanced in years, in losing her sons had lost her capacity for domestic enjoyment, these young women had not ; therefore, not for her sake, or with false regard for the memory of the departed, will she condemn these to perpetual widowhood, as if it were impossible they should be happy again. "The Lord grant you that you may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband." Their beauty and virtue would soon, with the Lord's blessing, procure them this, and far be it from this pious mother-in-law to put the slightest restraint upon them ; rather, as they had done their duty so well to the dead, who can never partake of their kind assiduities again, let the same conjugal virtues have scope once more, and let their kindness to the dead be recompensed with the Lord's blessing on their "rest" with the living.

But ere they for ever part, "she kissed them,"—time out of mind the parting token

of affection. And did they part? Many a rich vein of love lies deep in the human heart, of which it is hardly conscious till the hour of separation lays it open to view. Then, as in the case of these two amiable young women, it burst forth in loud lamentation and tears; "they lifted up their voice and wept." They could not so easily be parted. They made up their minds to accompany her; "Surely we will return with thee unto thy people." Tender and persuasive was the reply of Naomi, "Turn again, my daughters; why will ye go with me; are there yet any more sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? Turn again, my daughters, go your way, for I am too old to have an husband. . . . Nay, my daughters, for it grieveth me much for your sakes that the hand of the Lord is gone out against me." The argument may seem strange to our ideas of propriety, but must be judged by the usages with which society was then familiar. From very

ancient times, through the whole East (see Gen. xxxviii. 11), it was the duty of a brother to marry the widow of his brother who had died without children, and the offspring of this marriage was considered that of the deceased, and entitled to his property and name. This custom was recognised and made a law in Israel (Deut. xxv.). The reason there assigned for this arrangement is, that "the *name*" of the deceased "be not put out of Israel." It operated also as a protection and provision for the defenceless widow. Now, if a hope from such a quarter lingered in the minds of her daughters-in-law, Naomi now cuts it off, by showing its absurdity; thus at same time evincing the fulness of her sincerity in relieving them from relative obligations, and giving them the fullest liberty to marry again, should Providence afford the opportunity.

Now commences a struggle in the mind of these young persons; nor was it of long

duration. Their attachment is equally sincere, but that of one is victorious over every other feeling. "They lift up their voice and weep again." Orpah returns the parting kiss, and takes leave for ever. She loves, but cannot love at the expense of all her earthly hopes ; so she returns to her people, and to her gods. Ruth cleaves to Naomi ; her struggle is over too, her decision soon made, and she will not part. Once more her resolution is tried, and the trial comes from a quarter which gives it added power, but in vain. "Behold," said Naomi, "thy sister-in-law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods ; return thou after thy sister-in-law." In vain,—her heart was fixed, the die was cast, and her determination sealed with a solemn oath.

But what shall we say of Naomi, in thus dissuading these daughters of Moab from following her, from the land of darkness to the region of spiritual light ? Why so

urgent for their return to where Moloch and Chemosh were worshipped with cruel rites and impure services? Why repress the desire to follow to that place, where even the stranger may come and pray towards God's house, and be heard from heaven His dwelling-place? At least it can be said for her, that she had no selfish views in thus acting. On the contrary, while they might be a support to her, as one indeed became, she had nothing to give them there. She knew "the heart of a stranger," and knew too, that, from its peculiar institutions, they would know this more in Israel than she in Moab. We ought also to remember that the ideas of a Jew on the dissemination of truth differ from a Christian's. From the nature of their economy, dim and indistinct were their prospects of its extension. It was a standing witness for the unity and spirituality of God among the nations; but to proselyte to itself was not its design. The stranger

who voluntarily came was welcome, but not invited. The simple preservation of truth was its aim. But even if Naomi thought of her daughters becoming worshippers of the true God, she knew it must be entirely voluntary, while much had to be resigned. In seeming, therefore, to discourage advances, she was only trying the strength of their resolution. So He, whose whole life was spent in seeking and saving the lost, was wont to try the professions of his followers: "If any one come after me, and hate not his father and mother, and wife and children, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." Words like these, as storms, may tear up the sickly resolutions of the half-hearted professor, but cause the purposes of the sincere to strike deeper in the heart's soil.

So it was with Ruth. Her resolution rose with the opposition offered to it; nobly was it formed, and beautifully was it expressed. "Entreat me not to leave thee,

to return from following after thee : for whither thou goest, I will go ; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge : thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. Where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried : the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me."

All she knew of the true God was learnt from Naomi, so we need not wonder that love to her was bound up with faith in Him, and that her piety assumed the form of personal attachment to her who induced it. The life and lips of Naomi were all the Bible she ever knew, but these had been enough ; to part with one was to part with both. As to cleave to Paul was, at Athens, to cleave to Christ (Acts xvii. 34), so to follow Naomi now, was to follow the Lord.

A lovely feature of Ruth's decision was its *promptness*. She did not entreat Naomi to stay till she had buried her parents, or even bid adieu to those of her house. She did not "confer with flesh and blood."

"Hinder me not," was her prayer to those who would interpose any obstacle. She had already in heart resigned all she valued once, and from that hour she would not leave.

Another feature of it was its *implicitness*. There is much in that word "*whithersoever*." She had heard all that Naomi had to say on the sacrifice and danger she incurred ; she had felt as others, the power of country and home over the mind ; she had counted the cost ; but she heard a voice calling her to another land ; she saw a hand that beckoned to other scenes ; and though these were all unknown, yet she felt the sign, she followed the call. It mattered not where Naomi might roam or rest, where she might live or die ; there would she be. How entire the surrender ! how confiding the trust of this young disciple ! Neither things seen nor unseen scared her from her journey.

Her decision was a *final* one. "God do

so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me." True, she knew not the deceitfulness of the heart, the fickleness of the human mind, yet it was sincerely said. In full purpose, she left a land of idols, to return no more. Nay, even after death, she would have her bones laid by Naomi's,—“ there will I be buried.” Such were her views of the God of Israel now, of his people, and of his promises, and such her faith in them, that she can leave for ever all that she valued once, in order to share them.

From day to day the young and the inconsiderate are called on to come to a decision, the same in substance, with far less to forego, and much more to obtain. “ If any one will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited if he gain the whole world, and lose

his own soul ; and what shall a man give in exchange for his soul ?" In considering *this* call, may my readers come to a decision upon it with the same promptitude, implicitness, and pre-severance, as this daughter of Moab.

III.

THE RETURN.

THE land of Canaan which God gave as the lot of His people's inheritance, was a land of hills and valleys which drank water of the rain of heaven. Judea, or the southern portion of the country, was particularly so. It consisted of a series of valleys lying between parallel ridges of hills, the sloping sides of which were often cultivated to the summit. One of these valleys, stretching east and west, was the fertile district of Ephratah, in which there were many vallages. Its chief town, though a small place, was Bethlehem. It lay on a rising ground on the south side of the valley, and was nearly six miles S.S.W. of Jerusalem,

which lay on the north side of the next of these parallel valleys, called the Valley of Rephaim. Bethlehem was but little among the thousands of Judah, but many hallowed recollections haunt the spot, from the day that Rachael died there in giving birth to Benjamin (Gen. xxxv. 19), to the day that Jesus was born in the same place (Matt. ii.). There Jacob mourned over the lifeless form of his best beloved, and thought that the Lord had begun to deal bitterly with him. There he reared a pillar over her remains, and the passing pilgrim is still pointed to Rachael's sepulchre to this day (Gen. xxxv. 20). It was David's birth-place and earliest home. The fields around it had often echoed to his harp, while he fed his father's sheep there, and sang of the "Shepherd of Israel who led Joseph as a flock," (1 Sam. xvi.) It was the water of its wells he longed to drink when they were in the hands of the enemy, and thought no water so sweet as

theirs, (1 Sam. xxiii. 15.) It was in its woody fields he discovered the Lord's choice of Zion for his abode (Psa. cxxxii. 6). In the same field, and to shepherds too, was revealed the gladdest news, and was sung the sweetest song that ever saluted mortal ears ; for there arose the "light that was to lighten the heathen and be the glory of Israel" (Luke ii.).

Bethlehem and its fields were the scene of our story too. The time was the beginning of barley harvest. The seasons follow not there as they do with us ; harvest follows the spring, and precedes the summer. Barley is reaped in the end of March or beginning of April, and its ingathering is quite over before the wheat harvest begins (See Exod. ix. 31, 32). There, as in every land where civil freedom is enjoyed, harvest is a time of gladness ; hence, "the joy of harvest" became proverbial (Isa. ix. 3), the toil, though great, being relieved by a sense of plenty. This joy, we may be sure, was

greater than usual at the close of a long and severe famine.

The joy of the Bethlehemite reapers, and the well-known valley covered over with corn, suggesting the most exhilarating ideas, formed a strong contrast to the state of the returning exile's mind. There was every thing to remind her of past delights now fled. These fields were once crowned with abundance for her, and the "joy of harvest" once filled her heart. But those who had formed her joy and pride were sleeping in distant graves. The desire of her eyes and the delights of her heart had been removed from her side since last she saw these fields ; and every venerable form would remind her of Elimelech ; and every young and mirthful reaper would bring Mahlon and Chilion before her eyes. Many a weary foot and aching heart she suffered before she reached Ephratah, and now when the well-known scene burst on her eye, we may fancy how it opened up the

sluices of grief in her soul, and perhaps, of deep regret that ever she had left it.

But in this secluded valley the arrival of such a pair of wanderers naturally excited attention. "All the city was moved about them." There was much to draw sympathy even before they were known, much more when it was whispered, Is this Naomi? Could it be? And who is this stranger on whom she leans for support? There was so much of likeness in the elder as to suggest the idea of Naomi, but so much of change as to stagger belief in her identity. Ten years under any circumstances produce change; but where these have brought repeated afflictions of every kind, they deal more rudely with the countenance and form; and stamp them with indications of premature decay. Well might the Bethlehemites say, Is this Naomi?

If the sight of her native country, the fields of her early possession, the place where her home first stood, and her chil-

dren were born and grew up, affected her deeply, this salutation would go still deeper to her heart. It may be she had not heard her own name repeated thus familiarly since it fell from her dying husband's lips. And the meaning it bore, contrasted with her desolate state. "Call me not Naomi, call me Mara, for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me." We who use names which have no meaning in our language except as terms of distinction, can hardly feel the force of this answer, which is intended to express as strongly as words can, the sense she entertained of her altered state. *Naomi* in Hebrew is a term of endearment equivalent to My Sweet. *Mara* means Bitterness, or perhaps, the Embittered. It was then as if she had said, I once was Naomi, when I was pleasant and sweet to one, and all things were pleasant and sweet to me. Now I am Mara, for my days are embittered with grief, and my mind soured by disappointment and loss.

No more let me hear that name which only reminds me of joys that are departed and a glory that is gone. "I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty ; why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the Lord hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me?"

Though there is much that is blameworthy in this language of the mourner, it is such as only a believing mourner could utter. There is that which shews she had not yet risen from under the blow, but there is also that which shews she had the principles by which she might rise. Observe from her expression two things. That she knew and acknowledged that it was the Lord who had brought these afflictions upon her. Peculiar is her reiteration of this, "the *Almighty* hath dealt bitterly with me,"—"the *Lord* brought me home empty,"—"the *Lord* hath testified against me,"—"the *Almighty* hath afflicted me." She could trace His hand in all her sor-

rows ; there was a peculiarity and severity in them that would not allow them to be classed with ordinary occurrences. Perhaps her husband and sons had died of ordinary diseases ; there is nothing strange in death—it is the common lot ; there was many a widow and childless woman in Israel, yet this was not less the Lord's doing. Much is gained when this is acknowledged. How touching the expressions themselves ! “The Almighty,” that is “the All-sufficient” (see Gen. xvii.), who cannot be enriched by what he has taken from me ; who cannot be impoverished by restoring all of which He has bereft me. “He hath dealt bitterly with me,” that is, “embittered me,” hath soured my few enjoyments left, or given me a strange disrelish for them. He “hath brought me back empty,” stripped of all I gloried in, widowed and bereaved ; and *He* has done it ; called away first my husband, then my eldest, and then my only son. Call me no

more by a name which was addressed to the wife and the mother alone, but cannot apply to the widow and childless. "The *Almighty* hath afflicted me."

She owns too that the Lord had a controversy with her; He "hath testified against me," a phrase which is never used but when affliction is conceived of as correction for sin (compare Isa. lix. 12 ; Jer. xiv. 7). She saw in each successive trial a witness against her for the idols she cherished in her heart ; she saw that not with those who now slept in the dust of the earth all unconscious of loss and past their probation, was this controversy, but with her who yet survived to recognise the hand that smote her, and the sin for which she was smitten. With these acknowledgments on her lips, is there not hope that Naomi may yet sing of mercy as well as of judgment ?

IV.

THE HARVEST FIELD.

It was because she "had heard that the Lord had visited His people in giving them bread" that Naomi returned to Bethlehem Judah. He who had shut up the heaven that there be no rain, had opened it again at the cry of His people, had enriched the soil and given "the appointed weeks of harvest," so that as she entered her native valley of Ephratah, the more than golden treasures of the field were waving around her. But alas! these fields wave not for her; she has no portion in them; she has waxed poor when others are in plenty; she went out full, but is brought back empty. She had once been in affluence,

but that very circumstance renders it more difficult either to *bear* the ills of poverty or to *remove* them. Perhaps she concealed her destitution, else why do we not hear of relief afforded her by those who sympathized with her in her bereavement? But something must be done, for the calls of want are imperative. Ruth sees that some are permitted to glean the straggling ears of corn in the harvest-fields, and thus obtain a scanty supply for present need. Humiliating, indeed, is the occupation, and unwonted the toil to one brought up amidst plenty, but bending her mind to her condition, she proposes to glean wherever she found leave to do so. Yet still, as a daughter, she honours her mother, by asking her permission. "Let me now go to the field, and glean ears of corn after him in whose sight I shall find grace. And she said unto her, Go, my daughter." She sets forth; but where, among so many reaper bands, will the stranger ask leave to glean? She knows

no one. All are alike to her ; but “her hap was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz, who was of the kindred of Elimelech.” It was altogether accidental that she lighted on that field ; that is, it was undesigned on her part, who knew not that there was such a one as Boaz, the wealthy and the good, much less that he bore any relation to her late husband. Naomi had not sent her thither ; but well might Naomi now begin to say, *God’s providence is mine inheritance*. Every step of the interesting gleaner is directed by a gracious hand. Many a field, it may be, she passed, and knew not why. Through some she went as promising as this, but in them she may not stay. With modesty she asks him who seemed to be the master, but proves to be only the steward, “ I pray you let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves.” Why did he not repulse her as a stranger from the gate? for he knew who she was ; or, if his heart was touched

with pity for her misfortunes, why did he not plead that he was only a servant, and bid her seek where a master could give leave? No. God had ordered all; and while men saw nothing but the casual meeting in a harvest field of its owner and a poor stranger gleaning, God designed it as one of those lesser wheels in the machinery of his administration on which some of its greater revolutions depend.

There, then, we find Ruth, not ashamed of her poverty, yet unwilling to eat the bread of idleness, as a prudent and virtuous and diligent woman, pursuing her very humble vocation, picking an ear of barley here and there from morn till mid-day. How long, ere that slow accumulation amount to what daily need calls for! Touching are the exhortations to Jewish proprietors on this subject by their great Lawgiver! "When ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not make clean riddance of the corners of thy field when thou

reapest, neither shalt thou gather any glean-
ing of thy harvest ; thou shalt leave them
unto the poor and the stranger ; I am the
Lord your God," (Lev. xxiii. 22 ; see also
Deut. xxiv. 19-22). The history illustrates
the precept ; it is too often forgotten that
*a duty enjoined on one side constitutes no
claim on the other ; and again, the absence
of claim on one side does not absolve from
duty on the other.* Duty must ever be vo-
luntarily discharged, and the breach of it
is cognizable by God, but by him alone.
Ruth had no claim to the gleanings of
Boaz's field ; but not on that account was
Boaz absolved from the duty of opening it
to the gleaning of the stranger and the
widow. Even the Law of Requirement, in
its spirit and tendencies, was a Law of Love.

But who is he into whose fields Ruth was
thus providentially brought ? Boaz was a
wealthy proprietor in Ephratah, according
to the old Jewish ideas of wealth. Salmon,
the son of Nahshon, the prince of the tribe

of Judah in the wilderness, had married Rahab of Jericho ; from him Boaz and Eli-melech were lineally descended ; hence they were of the same family. The division of the Jewish nation was into tribes, families, and households ; hence one might be of the same family with another, yet a comparatively distant relative. It is evident from the whole story, that Boaz was a pious, kind, and venerable man, who had been " hid in the day of famine," and was now crowned with plenty.

Beautiful is the scene which now opens before us of a pious Jew and his servants in olden time. These latter were not hired men, but, dwelling " within his gates," constituted his household. Some, usually in a kind of bondage, others served for a term of years, according to the Mosaic law of service. The whole household lived together, fared together, and worshipped together. Going out into the fields to see how the work proceeds, and the workmen fare, Boaz

salutes his reapers with, The Lord be with you ; which they return with, The Lord bless thee. Would it have been recorded, had these been words of course ? Is not mutual regard of master and servant here sanctified by the fear of the Lord ? Who thus address each other are likely to discharge all relative duties well,—the master to shew real kindness, the servant fidelity and respect.

From the reapers he turns round to observe the gleaners ; these, perhaps, as in every age, were mostly the children of his own neighbours, or well-known poor people ; but one he notices as “ a stranger there.” There was something in her manner different from and superior to that of others. “ Whose damsel is this ?” He had not seen her before—an evidence of Ruth’s modesty and retiring habits. The steward knew well his master’s disposition ; not afraid of the liberty he had given, he answers the question in a way suited to show

her poverty and industry. "It is the Moabitish damsel that came back with Naomi out of the country of Moab ; and she said, I pray you let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves ; so she came, and hath continued from the morning until now, that she tarried a little in the house ;" that is, the shed or booth under which the reapers took their mid-day rest. We may imagine the surprise of Boaz to find her here. He had heard, in part, her story, but not that she was so reduced. He feels his pity drawn out for one so young, so dutiful, so pious, yet so unfortunate, and longs for the "luxury of doing good." The delicacy, tenderness, and kindness with which he addresses the stranger, and the care he takes not to hurt, but rather soothe her feelings, might well affect her heart. "Hearest thou not, my daughter ?" a term of kindness to inspire confidence, (see Matt. ix. 22). "Go not to glean in another field, neither go from hence, but

abide here fast by my maidens ; let thine eyes be on the field that they do reap, and go thou after them ; have I not charged the young men, that they shall not touch thee ? and when thou art athirst, go unto the vessels, and drink of that which the young men have drawn." Thus, without hinting yet at his knowledge of her connection, but as if in simple kindness, he bids her welcome to his fields as if she were one of his own ; he charges his reapers to treat her respectfully, and guard her from the rudeness of others ; and when weary and faint with unaccustomed toil, he bids her freely share the refreshments provided for his servants. Ignorant of who or what he was to her, she is overcome by his kindness and regard ; liberty to glean was all she wanted or expected, but this affects her ; "she fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground," betraying by her manner and address, that gleaning was not her occupation. "Why," said she, "have I found

grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger?" Yes, "a stranger;" this had greater emphasis in Judea than anywhere else, where dwelt a secluded, separated, and exclusive people, with privileges all their own, from which the stranger was jealously kept apart. To repress the constant tendency of the Jewish institutions upon a selfish heart, the law enjoined them to be kind to strangers. With superior grace, she acknowledges his kindness as a thing unlooked for and unmerited by her. Her humility and the touching allusion to her condition, raises her still higher in his esteem; he must tell her he knows her story, though he never saw her before. Few addresses are more deeply affecting yet inspiring than this of Boaz; it discloses the feelings of a man of benevolence and piety, who could see where consolation was needed and deserved, and knew how to administer it. "It hath fully been shewed

me all that thou hast done unto thy mother-in-law, since the death of thine husband ; and how thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore. The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust." Though a stranger, she was not unknown,—her piety to her widowed mother, herself a widow, and her choosing to remain so for her sake, and share her desolate fortune,—her determination and sacrifices were all known. That finding in Naomi a better mother than in her who bare her, she had left all to sojourn among a people hitherto unknown ; pity it was that such piety should be a stranger here. The Lord, whose worship she had chosen, and whose people she had adopted, would recompense her work, and the protecting wings of Him who overshadows the mercy-seat, would be her sure defence and

full reward. This was just the encouragement that was needed by Ruth. Well might she say, "Let me find favour in thy sight, my lord : for that thou hast comforted me, and for that thou hast spoken friendly unto thine handmaid, though I be not like unto one of thine handmaidens." He had indeed *spoke to her heart*, as the literal rendering of the phrase *speaking friendly* is ; he had strengthened her resolution, and encouraged her to persevere, though she felt herself to be less than any of his female servants, for they were daughters of Abraham—she but a Moabitess. But his kindness has not yet ceased. He bids her come at meal-time ; and, though not labouring for him, partake freely of the food provided for his reapers, and even dip her morsel in the weak wine or prest grape juice used to refresh them in their warm work. She cheerfully complied ; sat down with the reapers, and shewed that her humility was not an empty profession, but that she could stoop practically to that

condition to which Providence had reduced her. There she was supplied with parched corn, which seems to have been a superior kind of food, with the charge to take home to her mother-in-law what she did not herself require. Refreshed, she rises to pursue her humble toil, which she continues till evening. Meanwhile Boaz secretly enjoins the reapers to allow her to glean, not only where the field was cleared, but among the sheaves, and now and then to drop a handful of ears when she was near, and leave them for her to glean without finding fault. The result of this kindness at the close of the day was apparent ; when beating out her gleanings ere she left the field, she found she had nearly half a bushel of barley to carry home. Though fatigued with her labour and her load, there is no doubt she returned with greater pleasure to their humble abode than she had felt since she left her native country. Then informing her mother-in-law of her success, and shew-

ing her the proofs of it, she did not conceal that, under God, she owed it in great measure to the kindness of Boaz, in whose fields she had gleaned. This awakens the devout gratitude of Naomi, who at once perceived that she was not forgotten, nor had her husband's name lost its influence over the hearts of those to whom he had been related. "Blessed of the Lord," said she, "be he who hath not left off his kindness to the living and to the dead." Then telling her daughter-in-law that he was one of their nearest kinsmen, she bid her accept his invitation, to keep fast by his reapers till the end of the harvest, and not be found in other fields. She did so, and proved that "the gleanings of the righteous is better than the harvest of the wicked."

V.

THE DEFENCELESS SEEKING PROTECTION.

As day by day, through the appointed weeks of harvest, Ruth pursued her humble calling, and left her mother-in-law to pass the solitary hours alone, how often would Naomi long for the return of that disinterested daughter, who had left her country, and with it, her hopes of "rest," on her account, and who was now picking up a scanty and precarious living for both. It is as natural for the aged to look back on the past, as for the young to look forward to the future; and perhaps during those days when Ruth, whose conversation had been wont to cheer her heaviest hours, was at a distance in the path of duty, Naomi

might brood with heart-sickness over the departed joys of the past. The Lord had dealt bitterly with her, and the bitterness of her cup was tempered only by the presence and love of one who could not be always with her. Ruth, too, might have her recollections and her thoughts of the future, though these seem to have been bounded by the life of her mother-in-law, with whom, when she slept in death, she sought to sleep ; but Naomi's sorrow was not so selfish as that of most, which usually broods over its own misfortunes, and turns every thought inward upon itself. She had said "Nay, my daughters, it grieveth me much for your sakes, that the hand of the Lord hath gone out against me ;" and now that Ruth hath exercised both ingenuity and industry in devising and carrying out a plan for their support, she will, it is all she can, devise a scheme for promoting the honour and happiness of her daughter-in-law. "My daughter, shall I not seek rest

for thee, that it may be well with thee?" It was but just; she was bound by nature and gratitude to do so; and should it be at the cost of dividing with another the affection and duty of one so loved, yet in that one's happiness her own will be increased. The happiness she sought for was that of marriage to one who had shewn he could appreciate her filial piety, and would be likely to value her conjugal affection. But how was this to be brought about?

"Behold, Boaz," said she, "winnoweth barley to-night in the thrashing-floor; wash thyself therefore, and anoint thee, and put thy raiment upon thee, and get thee down to the floor, make not thyself known to the man until he shall have done eating and drinking; and it shall be when he lieth down, that thou shalt mark the place where he shall lie, and thou shalt go in and uncover his feet and lay thee down, and he will tell thee what thou shalt do." There is much ingenuity here—much of that kind

for which females have been famous since the days of Rebekah ; but the piety and prudence of it lie open to question. We ought not, indeed, hastily to condemn the acts of those who lived so long ago, and so far away—whose manners differed so much from ours, and whose feelings were modified by these manners and usages. Were we unexpectedly to witness some of the customs which now prevail in foreign countries, we should not only shrink from them as strange, but be apt to stigmatise them as immoral, though they involve no breach of the moral law. Some customs, strange indeed to us, of the ancients, were not only uncensured, but adopted into the laws of Moses, and form part of them. At same time, no plea of custom can ever justify what is sinful in itself, or even in its tendency ; and however honourable the ends of Naomi were, she cannot be acquitted from the charge of adopting a policy which might have proved the occasion of sin, or

matter of scandal. Actions of good men are not necessarily good because they are recorded in Scripture without direct censure ; no, not even when they are successful.

Accustomed, from principle and affection, to obey, Ruth followed the advice implicitly. The harvest is past, and the labours of the thrashing-floor begin. This was generally celebrated by a feast given by the owner to his labourers on the scene of their work. As Ruth kept fast by the maidens of Boaz through the harvest, she might have joined herself to them in her best attire on this occasion, without exciting unusual attention. It is not easy otherwise to conjecture how she managed to play her proper part without suspicion or discovery before the proper time.

How picturesque the view this passage affords of the simple manners of these early times ! “ When Boaz had eaten and drank, and his heart was merry, he went to lie

down at the end of the heap of corn." "A mighty man of wealth," working the whole day at winnowing grain and spending the night on the corn-floor with the shelter of a heap of barley ! Corn-floors in the East are elevated spots, levelled and covered, but open at all sides. They were always out of town where all resided ; but in peaceful times, men might sleep in the warm weather that succeeded harvest-time, with the light roof of a corn-floor as their only shelter and defence. The corn having been trodden out and separated from the straw, was transferred to the floor, where the whole was tossed up into the air with a shovel ; sometimes, when the wind was low, a fan was used, to which allusion is made in Isa. xxx. 24 ; Matt. iii. 12. As this work could not be performed by one person, Boaz had perhaps dismissed his servants to the city, or sent them to sleep in the surrounding sheds ; for when Ruth "came softly, and uncovered his feet, and laid her down," it

is evident no one else was present, which indeed would have frustrated Naomi's object. To accomplish His own purposes, God often gives success to schemes which he does not approve. So here we see a young and unprotected female venturing where she ought not; whatever confidence she had in her own virtue, or in the piety of Boaz, she had no right to put either to so strong a trial. Her object, or at least Naomi's for her, was to secure the personal affections as well as the legal protection of her kinsman. She succeeded; but success here ought not to tempt others to tread so near the verge of sin to accomplish any purpose, when high principle and piety point out another course. We are apt to form schemes, even for the glory of God, to which his word gives no countenance, and then plead success as our warrant. It is ours to follow the dictates of His word, and leave him to accomplish his will by what means he may.

Well might the good man be astonished

and embarrassed to find a female in this situation, and hastily inquire, "Who art thou?" The well directed answer at once explained all,—“I am Ruth, thine handmaid; spread therefore thy skirt over thy handmaid, for thou art a near kinsman.” She sought his protection according to the Mosaic Law, which could only be given by his marrying her, as the interview of Boaz with the kinsman nearer than he next day fully shews. To spread the skirt or the wing over one was to afford protection, a symbol of matrimonial guardianship, as the Jew to this day in the marriage ceremony throws the skirt of his *talith* over his bride, to signify that he has taken her under his protection, (see Ezek. xvi. 8). Everything depended on the view Boaz took of the design. The Lord disposed him to view it in the most favourable light. “Blessed be thou of the Lord, my daughter; for thou hast shewed more kindness in the latter end, than at the beginning, inasmuch as

thou followedst not young men, whether poor or rich. And now, my daughter, fear not ; I will do to thee all that thou requirest ; for all the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman. And now, it is true that I am thy near kinsman ; howbeit there is a kinsman nearer than I. Tarry this night, and it shall be in the morning, that if he will perform unto thee the part of a kinsman, well ; let him do the kinsman's part ; but if he will not do the part of a kinsman to thee, then will I do the part of a kinsman to thee, as the Lord liveth ; lie down until the morning." The meaning of part of this is obscure ; but it is evident that whatever he thought of the way she took to effect it, he considered her object a pious one, to preserve the house and name of Elimelech, and his lot in Israel entire. He gives a noble testimony to her character, and the opinion entertained of her by those who had the best opportunity of observing her

conduct; and gives his solemn promise with the sanction of an oath, that failing a nearer relation undertaking the part to whom it belonged, he would do so. From this we perceive, that Boaz was under no obligation to take on himself the kinsman's office; he was not the nearest kinsman, and even if so, he was not a brother; and even if he had been, Ruth was a Moabitess, and could not claim such a right; so that the whole policy of Naomi was to secure the good will of Boaz, by which alone her object could be effected.

We can sympathise with the feelings of Boaz in the delicacy of his situation at the moment. He could not send her out at midnight, yet he would not endanger his own character and hers, by its being "known that a woman came into the floor." The only way was for her to rest till morning, and then by daybreak "before one could know another" to leave the place. What requires secrecy like this betrays, at

least, imprudence. What is done by stealth and requires the darkness, is apt to induce deceit or falsehood. Never let us place ourselves in situations, where such means seem necessary for success. With characteristic generosity he will not send her away empty. Her veil or hyke, the upper garment still worn in the East, is spread out, and six measures of barley are poured into it,—perhaps as much as she could carry. With a light heart, and a heavy load, she found her way back to her mother-in-law's dwelling.


We cannot suppose that Naomi slept sound, if at all that night. Honour waited on her scheme, if successful, and deep disgrace was the only alternative. She would either be restored by it to comparative prosperity, or a bitterer draught than any she had yet drunk would be the result. How eager her first inquiries we need not say, "What cheer, my daughter?" The tale was soon told. So far all was well,

yet still there was something in the issue doubtful. However she felt assured that her daughter's cause had fallen into good hands ; she rightly left it there, and quietly waited the event.

VI.

THE HAPPY ISSUE.

How simple are the manners of society before it gets into an artificial state ! It is not for us to say whether for the better or the worse (Eccles. vii. 10). Each state has its advantages and corresponding drawbacks. But this simplicity of manners in the ancients accounts for many things which appear strange, if not wrong to us. The "gate" has ever been the place of concourse, holiness and judgment in the East. There, controversies were decided and business transacted in the open air before all. The elders who sat there, were men whose age, experience, and practical wisdom, pointed them out as fittest for the



civil government and judicial office in the city. They were its magistrates, by whom all controversies were decided. In fulfilment of his promise to Ruth, Boaz repaired to the gate of Bethlehem, and calls on its elders to be witnesses and judges of his course. It was not long ere the person passed to whom he had alluded before as the next of kin surviving to Elimelech, who possessed the first right of redemption, and on whom devolved the duty of acting the kinsman's part. It is evident that the relation was so distant, that though the right of redemption still remained, he could not be called on to make the claim and fulfil its duties under legal penalties ; still Boaz respected the priority of his right until it was waived. "Naomi, who is come again out of the country of Moab," said he, "sellet a parcel of land which was our brother Elimelech's ; and I thought to tell thee in thine ear, saying, Buy it before the inhabitants, and before the elders

of my people. If thou wilt redeem it, redeem it ; but if thou wilt not redeem it, then tell me, that I may know ; for there is none to redeem it besides thee ; and I am after thee." Naomi's sale was not exactly such in our sense of the word. Indeed she had nothing to sell, her husband having sold all before leaving the country for Moab ; but like all Jewish sales, the real property was alienated only till the year of release, or the jubilee, when it returned to the heirs-male of the family. If there was no heir, it was retained by the purchaser. Meantime the land might be redeemed at a certain rate fixed by law, but only by the nearest kinsman to preserve it in the family, and with the design of raising an heir to it. Naomi's selling the land was simply calling on the goel or nearest of kin to redeem the land in her right from the purchaser, before the year of Jubilee, else it would be lost for ever. But the doing so, unless he were a brother,

was entirely voluntary in his part. It might, or it might not, be eligible for him to do it, but it was disreputable to refuse if he were able. Naomi's nearest of kin at once agreed to redeem the land, but when he found that the day he purchased the land he must "buy also Ruth the Moabiteess, the wife of the dead, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance," he drew back and yielded his claim in favour of Boaz the next in degree. He saw that the land should not be his, nor merge into his inheritanae, but should be the property of Ruth's child or children, who should bear not his, but Mahlon's name in the estate and genealogy, the real father's name being sunk. "I cannot redeem it," said he, "lest I mar my own inheritance." How, does not appear; perhaps he was married, and had a family already, while the purchase of Elimelech's estate would reduce his family's means without adding to their inheritance. From

this, it is likely, Boaz was free, and as he seemed inclined to take the office, the goel willingly transferred it to him in a lawful way ; that is, according to the custom of the time, in transferring a claim of this kind, the granter took off his shoe and gave it to the grantee in presence of witnesses, as a conveyance of the land which he possessed the right to tread on. The Jews at a subsequent period gave a glove, and, in modern times, give a handkerchief or veil on similar occasions.

Simplicity and integrity characterise the declaration of Boaz before the elders of Bethlehem respecting his purpose and motives in assuming the kinsman's office. "Ye are witnesses this day that I have bought all that was Elimelech's, and all that was Chilion's and Mahlon's, of the hand of Naomi. Moreover, Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name

of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren, and from the gate of his place : ye are witnesses this day." The elders assented, " We are witnesses." Beautiful is the blessing they pronounce on this union, shewing the high sense they entertained of the disinterested piety of Boaz in the whole transaction, who, while he added nothing to his patrimonial inheritance, purchased what was not to be reckoned to him or to his family ; and, honouring a divine institution, shewed a preference to an exile, a foreigner and a Moabitess, who had become a convert to the worship of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings she had come to trust. The allusion to Rachael and Leah and Tamar in the elders' blessing, was perhaps suggested by the idea that they were proselytes too.

Boaz was faithful to his promise to Ruth, and to his declaration to the elders of his city. The property was, no doubt, restored by redemption, but as that was the

circumstance of least importance, it is not mentioned. Ruth becomes the happy wife of the noble and generous Boaz, the possessor of the fields where she was so lately a gleaner. Soon she becomes the glad mother of a son, the tabernacle of Elimelech, which was broken down, is built up again, and Naomi lives to recal her complaint, and chide the unbelief that charged the Lord foolishly. Her feelings may be more easily conceived than expressed as she took the child and laid it in her bosom, while "the women her neighbours," sympathising with her joy, exclaim, There is a son born to Naomi! She felt that he was hers. By custom, and by divine institution, he was Elimelech's son. This was her goel or kinsman, through whom all, once deemed lost, is now redeemed, and "Blessed be the Lord who had not left her without a kinsman that his name should be famous in Israel, who should be a restorer of her life, and a nourisher of her

old age ; for her daughter-in-law, who loved her, and was better to her than seven sons, had born him."

Behold the reward of consistent piety in domestic scenes ! When a stranger and poor, a widow and childless, and none left her on whom she had a legal claim for support or protection, except her daughter-in-law ; she foregoes even this claim, and would cast herself wholly on that providence which had dealt bitterly with her, but that same providence strangely binds that daughter of Moab to her, and she will not leave, "The Lord," said Naomi, "hath brought me back empty." O she should not have said "empty," with such an attendant, so loving, and self-denied, and better to her than seven sons !

The obvious virtue of Ruth was filial piety, more strikingly exemplified as she was only a daughter by marriage. What could induce so strong an attachment ? Naomi's natural kindness goes far to ac-

count for it, as may be seen in Orpah's case, but not to this extent—"God do so to me and more also, if aught but death part thee and me." Theirs was a relation of confessedly delicate duties and feelings. Where mother and daughter-in-law are left to adjust their mutual rights under the same roof, an equal balance is rarely maintained ; but here it was, and with something more than mere justice. Was it not then Naomi's piety, elevated and elevating, attractive and consistent, which, rising above every domestic jealousy, bound the heart of Ruth to hers, and made it a thing impossible to part ? That was a love that bound her through all ill, and brought her at length to a nobler trust. Personal attachment, natural affection, have often thus been sanctified, and the very remembrance of a father's or a mother's piety and love, has given its decided weight to warning and advice too long neglected. Ruth obeyed the voice of affection, and soon

heard another, deeper and kinder still. By faith she followed, and listened to its echo in Boaz's blessing, (chap. ii. 12). Now that blessing is receiving its fulfilment. The Lord recompenses her work, and even in this life she knows how blessed that people are whose God is Jehovah ; that there is none like the God of Jeshurun ; that, grafted on the stock of Judah, Jacob's blessing too is hers, and when the generations of Jesus Christ the promised seed are written, the name of Ruth, though a female and a Moabitess, shall not be forgotten.

Poor Orpah !

VII.

THE KINSMAN.

THERE was a relation, a character recognised by the law of Moses, which bore the Hebrew name of *Göel* and is variously rendered by our translators, "Kinsman," "Avenger" (of blood), and "Redeemer," words which, to our minds, convey no idea in common, but which are expressive enough of the duties involved in the relation. That it bore a typical meaning, was evident to the Jews themselves from the frequency with which the Lord himself took the title in relation to his people, as well as the triumphant exclamation of Job, "I know that my Redeemer liveth?" thus applying the term to the future Deliverer

from death and the grave. Perhaps one design, if not the principal one, of the Holy Spirit in dictating this book, was to shew the working of this institution in reference to the office and work of Christ. It has been already shewn what were the kinsman's duties, to preserve the inheritance to the family, and the family to the inheritance. Elimelech sells his land, hopes to redeem it, or at least to recover it at the jubilee ; but he dies poor ; his children also die ; the hope of succession is lost ; nothing remains but deep poverty to the survivors, and a name soon to be cut off. Here Boaz, as the göel, or next of kin, interposes ; redeems the inheritance to the family, and builds up a family to the inheritance, and both duties are so bound together, that one without the other cannot be discharged, (ch. iv. 5). Beautifully does this illustrate the office and work of Christ our Göel, the Avenger of our fall,

our Kinsman, the Redeemer of our lost inheritance.

He redeemed the lost inheritance. Man, like this family, had sold his all, and left the land of promise, indulging the vain hope of restoration. He could not be reconciled to privation for a while, so he went into a far country, and spent his all. He had intercourse with the natives of that country, and there suffered loss. Now destitute, he would fain be filled with the husks that the swine do eat,—would be too happy to glean the fields which once he owned. Crumbs now would suffice, or a hired servant's place. The desolate widow and orphan give but a faint idea of his condition, "an outcast," "having no hope and without God in the world." All that is valuable to an immortal being is now gone. Heaven, and life, and divine favour to enjoy it. But Christ is his Göel, the "Redeemer of the purchased possession." It was sold to Justice, and must be *bought*

back ; it was forfeited to law, and must be lawfully regained. The full price was paid, "not with corruptible things as silver and gold, but with precious blood." Man never could have paid it, its redemption was too precious ; its ransom price too high, (Psa. xlix. 8). How long ere that poor gleaner buy back the land she gleans by the scanty ears she picks up ? Yet sooner will her industry and frugality thus redeem these broad acres, than man redeem his lost inheritance by his "works of righteousness." He is involved in a debt for which he has "nothing to pay." In temporal things nothing is impossible to perseverance, which may repossess much that was lost ; but here man can never rise to solvency. In the struggle, so far from reducing the old claim, new debts are contracted faster than he can pay them ; how, then, should he accumulate ought to redeem the inheritance ? And if all hope from himself is vain, as much so

is any hope from the creature. Angels would only "mar their own inheritance" in the attempt. They stand by grace, and have no righteousness to spare. The wealth of all worlds, visible or invisible, cannot meet the demand. Hopeless was his case. But "blessed be Jehovah, who left him not without a Kinsman!"—a Redeemer, who not only paid the debt but restored the inheritance. Now, we "know the grace of Him who, though he was rich yet for his sake became poor, that he through his poverty might be rich." It impoverished our Kinsman to buy us back our lost estate. "He emptied himself," (Phil. ii. 7), resigned "the glory he had with the Father before the world was," and put the value of his divine nature upon the sacrifice of his humanity. From this let us compute the value of an inheritance so dearly bought. Glorious things are spoken of it; and happy they who, through faith in the great

Redeemer, shall enter upon possession of it.

But our Göel has bought *us* too. Such was required of Ruth's kinsman, (chap. iv. 5). Such was required of ours too. It was not enough that the estate should be redeemed to us; we must be redeemed *with* it and *to* it. We had sold ourselves for nought; given not only our substance but ourselves away, and could no more redeem our persons than our property. We were slaves, and the bondage of corruption was ours. But "blessed be Jehovah, who left us not without a Kinsman!" One who in his love and in his pity redeemed us, and thus raised us to the full rights of the purchased possession.

But how? By becoming a Kinsman indeed. Forasmuch as we "were partakers of flesh and blood, he also took part of the same." By an act of divine power he entered into relation with human nature,

that he might raise that nature into mystic relation with himself. By an act of grace He joins us to himself by a blessed union, to which the marriage-bond bears some resemblance, and thus, putting himself in the place of "nearest of kin," he puts his redeemed in a state of perfect right. "This is a great mystery," (Eph. v. 32) ; and, like other mystic unions, as that of the soul and body, *manifest* in its effects, though *hidden* in its nature and manner. It is often referred to in the devotional and prophetic scriptures of the Old Testament, (Psalm xlv. ; Isa. liv. 5 ; Hos. ii. 19, 20 ; Cant. passim). The same view of the believers' union to Christ is given in the New Testament, (John iii. 29 ; Eph. v. 32 ; Rev. xix. 7 ; xxi. 9). To be united to the Son of God by a bond more endearing and enduring than the closest on earth, and, with all believers, to be presented at last, as one body, to Himself a glorious Church, with-

out spot or wrinkle or any such thing,—
holy and unblemished. Surely this, to
every one who has left all for Christ, will
be “a full reward from the Lord God of
Israel, under whose wings he has come to
trust.”

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